

# The Difference Between AD's and ND's!

*By Brian S. Williams - Certified Law Enforcement Trainer / Instructor*

I was cleaning my gun and it went off! I picked up my gun from the table and it fired! I went to unload my gun and it fired! I was putting on the safety and the gun fired!

Of the four "Explanations" for the "Unintentional Discharges" above, three represent what is known as a "ND" or Negligent Discharge and one represents a true "AD" or Accidental discharge.

Unfortunately, the term "Accidental Discharge" is far too often mis-applied to all events where a firearm discharges without the intention of the handler. Therefore, within this article I would like to clarify these two very different events. It is important however before we get into the differences between an "AD" (Accidental Discharge) and an "ND" (Negligent Discharge) to first understand the basic mechanics and relationship between a firearm and ammunition and the reasons for firearms accidents.

To begin with, all firearms consist of three major components, including: The Barrel, The Frame and The Action. For our purposes however we will focus mainly on the "Action" and the "Barrel" as the relationship between the weapon and ammunition are the most significant here.

**The barrel of a firearm is simply a metal tube through which the projectile (Bullet) passes.**

As defined above, the barrel is simply a metal tube. However this simple tube is actually comprised of a combination of parts which include:

- ***The Bore which is the inside section of the barrel.***
- ***The muzzle which is the front of the barrel where the bullet exits.***
- ***The "Rifling" which are spiral grooves which are cut into the inside wall of the bore to cause the bullet spin.***
- ***NOTE: Depending on the type of firearm (Revolver or Semi-Automatic), the "Chamber" which is where the cartridge is held during the firing process MAY be attached to the barrel. This however is NOT the case with a revolver as cylinder is used to hold the cartridges which is separate from the barrel.***

**The action of a firearm is defined as: "A group of moving parts which are designed and intended to load, fire and unload a firearm".**

The action however is considerably more involved however, so in short and to keep it simple, this means that if it moves and was designed to move for the purpose of operating the firearm, it is part of the action.

**The firing sequence of a cartridge is divided into four separate actions which include:**

The next principle we need to discuss is what is known as the firing sequence. It is this principle which utilizes all of the parts of the action to cause or permit the firearm to discharge.

- ***The trigger is depressed causing the hammer to be engaged and ultimately to fall and strike the firing pin.***
- ***The firing pin then strikes the primer which will ignite generating a “Micro Flame” which will travel through what is known as the “Flash Hole” inside of the cartridge case and ignite the powder charge.***
- ***The powder charge will be ignited causing a rapid build-up of gas behind the projectile (Bullet).***
- ***The pressure generated behind the projectile will then force the projectile down the “Path of Least Resistance” in this case what is known as the “Bore” of the barrel and out of the muzzle (Front) of the weapon.***

**The main causes of firearms accidents:**

According to the NRA, there exists two (2) causes of firearms accidents. Unfortunately, the NRA takes a rather gentle in my opinion approach in the terminology they use to describe these causes. The two causes are:

1. ***Ignorance – Which is defined as a “Lack of knowledge or understanding of a specific topic. While there is NOTHING wrong with being ignorant of something that is why we learn, there IS a MAJOR problem when someone who is ignorant of firearms and their functions handles them without supervision or proper instruction.***
2. ***Carelessness – This cause is in many ways WORSE than ignorance, as Carelessness is defined as “The lack of awareness during a behavior that results in the unintentional production of alternate consequences or actions.”. The key his is that the handler knows fully what they SHOULD be doing and the various safety rules. However for whatever reason they neglect to apply or abide by them and as a result an incident occurs.***

Ok, now that we have a basic understanding of what the process of how a firearm functions and how unintentional discharges occur. It is time for us to move on to the types firearm discharges.

**There are 3 reasons ONLY why a firearm CAN or WILL discharge. These three reasons include:**

1. ***Intentional Discharge – Where a conscious decision is made by the handler to discharge the firearm. The actual intent or reason behind this action is one which only the shooter can answer.***
2. ***The Accidental Discharge – Also known as the “AD” which is where there was NO intention on the part of the handler to discharge the firearm and as a result of a “MECHANICAL FAILURE” the firearm discharges.***

***An example I remember as if it were yesterday is an incident which took place many years ago when I worked at a local gun store. A regular customer came in one day and had decided that he wanted to purchase a particular handgun. This specific firearm was of lower quality and as much as I tried to get him to make another selection, he***

*was intent on this firearm. So the paperwork was completed and off he went. What happened next is something I will NEVER forget, as it clearly illustrates what an Accidental Discharge is!*

*The next day this customer returned to the store in what can only be politely described as agitated..... very agitated to be exact! He proceed to explain to me that he had taken his new firearm home cleaned and then loaded it and in the process of engaging the Decocking Lever which includes what is known as a "Hammer Drop Safety" (This is a lever which is intended to safely drop the hammer of a cocked firearm against a block of steel keeping it away from the firing pin.) the weapon fired! At first I thought this customer was crazy since what he was describing was something which was not supposed to be possible with this type of safety. However, perhaps in an attempt to appease him I decided to try an experiment. After checking and confirming that the firearm was empty, I cocked the hammer and lowered a pen down the bore. When I activated the decocking lever to my surprise the pen flew out of the barrel. His money was immediately refunded.*

*The above represents a classic example of a "Accidental Discharge", as the weapon discharged without the intent of the handler who DID exactly what he was supposed to do. Yet the mechanics of the weapon did NOT function as they were intended or designed to.*

- 3. The Negligent Discharge – Also known as the "ND" is also the discharge of the firearm without the intent of the handler, however because of improper actions on the part of the handler the weapon fires!**

Although accidental discharges do happen as a result of mechanical failures, in most but certainly not all cases where a firearm discharges without the intent of the handler the cause is more closely related to a **NEGLIGENT DISCHARGE** which is where the firearm will do EXACTLY as it was designed and intended to do. Except as stated above the reason for the discharge was at minimum in part because of the actions of the handler!

### **About the Author**

Brian Scott Williams is the founder, CEO and Director of Training at Grey Wolf Consulting, with nearly 3 decades of combined experience in law enforcement, close security consulting and as a professional trainer and instructor in weapons and tactics, he has authored "Welcome to the Real World, A Dangerous Place to be Caught Unprepared!" and is the creator of the The O.E.T. System™ for C.Q.B. Engagements. In 1995 he received a commendation for bravery from the Lake Housatonic Authority Marine Police and in November of 2000 was accepted to the Connecticut State Police Firearms Advisory Council. As a certified NRA training counselor and law enforcement instructor, Brian has received training through The Heckler & Koch International Training Division, DEF-TEC Law Enforcement Training Division and other sources. He is a certified N.A.U.I. Master Level Scuba Diver in underwater rescue techniques, a former Emergency Medical Technician in the State of Connecticut, and served for 18 months as a chief training officer for a local volunteer ambulance Corp, with responsibilities that included the design and implementation of training programs for Corp personnel.

For additional information about the training services provided by Brian S. Williams or his company Grey Wolf Consulting, LLC please visit [www.greywolfconsulting.us](http://www.greywolfconsulting.us)